

No. 83-734

In the Supreme Court of the United States

OCTOBER TERM, 1983

BAYOU DES FAMILLES DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION, PETITIONER

V.

UNITED STATES CORPS OF ENGINEERS, ET AL.

ON PETITION FOR A WRIT OF CERTIORARI TO THE UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS FOR THE FIFTH CIRCUIT

BRIEF FOR THE RESPONDENTS IN OPPOSITION

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QUESTIONS PRESENTED

- 1. Whether there has been a "taking" of petitioner's property for which it is entitled to just compensation under the Fifth Amendment.
- 2. Whether the Corps of Engineers' denial of petitioner's application for a permit was arbitrary, capricious or otherwise not in accordance with law.

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OPINIONS BELOW

The opinion of the district court (Pet. App. A10-A43) is reported at 541 F. Supp. 1025. The opinion of the court of appeals (Supp. Pet. App. C1) is not reported.

JURISDICTION

The judgment of the court of appeals (Pet. App. A46-A47) was dated June 23, 1983, but was not filed until August 19, 1983, after it was issued as the court's mandate on August 18, 1983. A petition for rehearing was denied on August 8, 1983 (Pet. App. A48). The petition for a writ of certiorari was filed on November 3, 1983. The jurisdiction of this Court is invoked under 28 U.S.C. 1254(1).

STATEMENT

Pet. App. A11-A12, A23-25. tidally washed and inundated with water at mean high tide. of the tide. Indeed, much of the subject property itself is coastal Waterway and both are subject to the ebb and flow Canal and Bayou Boeuf are connected to the Gulf Interand Bayou Boeuf, a natural waterway. Both the Kenta artificial waterway that extends into the subject property, The plan also called for the blocking of the Kenta Canal, an permit the construction of residences and other buildings. area. Portions of the property were to be filled in order to construction of a levee and pumping station to drain the development plan called for the excavation of a canal and Mississippi River, not far from New Orleans. Petitioner's imately 2,000 acres of land located on the west bank of the formed in August 1972 to develop and sell a tract of approx-1. Petitioner is a real estate investment venture that was

August 1973. Although it obtained permits for the project from the local government of Jefferson Parish, it did not apply to the Corps of Engineers for a permit. In a series of letters beginning in October 1973, the Corps advised petitioner that a permit for the levee construction might be necessary. Receiving virtually no response to its letters, in January 1974 the Corps issued a cease and desist order to petitioner, stating that it had determined that a permit for the construction of the levee and canal was necessary. At the time the cease and desist order was issued, the levee was approximately 90% complete. Pet. App.A13-A14.1

Petitioner correctly states (Pet. 4) that employees of Jefferson Parish sent copies of petitioner's construction plans to the Corps of Engineers Planning Division on August 12, 1973, and that the Division indicated that the levee would provide substantial hurricane protection. As the district court noted (Pet. App. A13), however, the Planning Division

The United States subsequently filed an enforcement action against petitioner in district court for violations of Section 10 of the Rivers and Harbors Appropriations Act of 1899, 33 U.S.C. 403. That proceeding was resolved through the entry of a judgment that required petitioner to pay a civil penalty of \$25,000 and to submit an after-the-fact application to the Corps for a permit covering the work afterady done on the project. Pet. App. A15.

On April 7, 1975, petitioner filed an after-the-fact permit application for its levee project. It subsequently submitted a draft environmental impact statement, which it revised in accordance with the Corps' comments. A public meeting on the project and the draft EIS was held on October 23, 1975. Many comments adverse to the project and some in favor of the project were received. Petitioner did not respond to the public comments, even though ample opportunity to do so was provided. Pet. App. A15-A16.

On September 17, 1979, the Corps of Engineers finally denied petitioner's permit application. Although the Corps had considered the anticipated flood control benefits and other claimed benefits of the project, it determined that the adverse environmental effects of the project outweighed the benefits. Pet. App. A18-A19.

 Petitioner also raises arguments involving the Jean Lafitte National Historical Park. The park was established by § 901 of Pub. L. No. 95-625, the National Parks and Recreation Act of 1978, 92 Stat. 3534, 16 U.S.C. 230 et seq.

One portion of the park is designated the Barataria Marsh Unit, itself comprising two areas. The first of these treas, the "core area," contains approximately 8,600 acres.

is no authority to issue permits. The Division of the Corps of Engiers that is authorized to issue permits only learned of the project in a report dated October 9, 1973, after which it took prompt action, as detailed in the text above (tbid.).

The Secretary of the Interior is authorized to acquire all land in that area, with some exceptions not relevant here. 16 U.S.C. 230a(a). Approximately 151 acres of petitioner's land are contained within the core area (Pet. App. A17), and have not yet been acquired by the Secretary.

tions had been promulgated. Pet. App. A17. the time of the district court's judgment, no local regulasix-month deadline was not met and it is undisputed that, at months from November 10, 1978" (16 U.S.C. 230a(b)). The U.S.C. 230a(c)), were to be developed "no later than six and protect enumerated values within the core area (16 the statute, these guidelines, whose purpose was to preserve enforced by the State or local units of government." Under ties within the park protection zone to be enacted and or criteria applicable to the use and development of properstate and local governmental units, to develop "guidelines quires the Secretary of the Interior, in consultation with petitioner's levee. Pet. App. A16. 16 U.S.C. 230a(b) re-12,000 acres. It includes part of petitioner's land and all of "park protection zone," and consists of approximately The other area of the Marsh Unit is denominated the

In the event state or local units of government fail to enact rules pursuant to the guidelines or fail to enforce the rules they have enacted, the Secretary is authorized, but not compelied, to purchase interests is land within the park protection zone "as he deems necessary" to protect the interests enumerated in 16 U.S.C. 230a(c). 16 U.S.C. 230a(e).

3. Petitioner commenced this action in the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Louisiana on November 2, 1979, seeking to enjoin the Corps' denial of its permit application on the grounds that the Corps lacked jurisdiction over the area in 1973 and that it failed to give proper weight to the flood protection benefits provided by petitioner's proposed levee. Petitioner also sought to enjoin the Corps' recommendation of a levee alignment other than

Department of the Interior from issuing guidelines under 16 U.S.C. 230a(b) because the six-month period specified by the statute had passed. Finally, petitioner sought to enjoin the Department from including petitioner's property within the "core area" of the park without providing funding for its acquisition. Pet. App. A19.

A26-A29). had been within that jurisdiction in October 1973 (Pet. App. Section 404 of the Clean Water Act, 33 U.S.C. 1344, and ting jurisdiction of the Corps of Engineers pursuant to concluded that the project was properly within the permitmarshland (Pet. App. A20-A25). The district court also jurisdiction over Bayou Boeuf, the Kenta Canal, and the the Corps of Engineers had properly asserted Section 10 ebb and flow of the tide. Accordingly, the court held that that much of petitioner's land was marshland subject to the Bayou Boeuf were subject to tidal influence and, indeed, petitioner had admitted) that both the Kenta Canal and ebb and flow of the tide, the district court concluded (as ble for the purposes of Section 10 if they are subject to the a permit issued by the Corps. Noting that areas are navigation or capacity of any navigable water unless authorized by prohibits any activity affecting the course, condition, locaand Harbors Appropriations Act, 33 .U.S.C. 403, which jurisdiction over the project under Section 10 of the Rivers App. A11). At the outset, the court held that the Corps had Corps of Engineers and on testimony taken at trial (Pet. ents based on an administrative record submitted by the The district court entered judgment in favor of respond-

On the merits, the district court held that the Corps of Engineers did not act in an arbitrary, capricious or otherwise improper manner in denying petitioner's application for a permit in 1979. Particularly in view of the substantial environmental benefits to be derived from the land in its

undeveloped state, the court found that the Corps of Engineers' denial of the permit was unobjectionable. The court expressly found that "[n]othing in the evidence presented at trial by plaintiffs suggests to the court that the decision to deny the permit was based on less than a full investigation of conditions and application of the relevant statutes to the facts adduced by the Corps." Pet. App. A29-A35.

Finally, the court considered a variety of other issues raised by petitioner. With respect to petitioner's constitutional claims, the court found no infirmity in Congress's requiring petitioner to obtain a permit from the Corps for the construction of the levee project, that the Corps' regulations governing the issuance of permits were not unconstitutionally vague, and that there was no evidence of improper selective enforcement. Pet. App. A35-A37. The court noted that there had been delay between the filing of petitioner's permit application and the Corps' denial of it in 1979, but concluded that the delay did not amount to a denial of due process. Pet. App. A37-A38.

The court further found that the legislation creating the Jean Lafitte National Historical Park was constitutional. With respect to the park protection zone, because the local regulations contemplated by the statute had not been issued, the court found that the question of their constitutionality was premature. Furthermore, the Secretarial guidelines called for by the statute would not themselves prohibit any activities. The court also concluded that the six-month deadline within which the Secretary was to issue the guidelines was "not intended as a limitation on power but rather as a guide for the conduct of orderly procedure." Accordingly, the court held, the Secretary was not disabled from issuing the guidelines in the future. Pet App. A38-A41.

Finally, the court concluded that there was no constitutional infirmity in the Department of the Interior's delay in condemning petitioner's land located within the core area;

mend the building of a hurricane protection levee in the location petitioner had requested; and that the question whether respondents' activities amounted to a constitutional taking was solely within the jurisdiction of the United States Court of Claims. Pet. App. A40-A43.

4. The court of appeals affirmed based on the reasoning of the district court (Supp. Pet. App. C1).2

ARGUMENT

The decision of the courts below represents the application of longstanding legal principles to well established facts. Moreover, the decision is correct and does not conflict with any decision of this Court or any other court of appeals. Further review therefore is not necessary.

1. The thrust of petitioner's argument (Pet. 7-10) is that the actions by the Corps of Engineers and the Department of the Interior were "confiscatory," and that petitioner therefore is entitled to recover just compensation for its property. This argument lacks substance.

Corps of Engineers, may regulate activities in navigable waters — to the extent of forbidding any construction—without there being a "taking" of private property. United States v. Rands, 389 U.S. 121, 123 (1967). It is likewise clear that in tidal waters, areas that are subject to the ebb and flow of the tide are navigable for the purposes of such regulation. See Kaiser Aetna v. United States, 444 U.S. 164, 171 n.6 (1979); id. at 181-183 (Blackmun, J., dissenting); United States v. De Felice, 641 F.2d 1169, 1172-1175 (5th Cir. 1981); Leslie Salt Co. v. Froehlke, 578 F.2d 742,

²The court of appeals subsequently dismissed without prejudice the portion of petitioner's complaint dealing with delay in condemnation of its land located in the core area.

753 (9th Cir. 1978); United States v. Stoeco Homes, Inc., 498 F.2d 597, 610 (3d Cir. 1974), cert. denied, 420 U.S. 927 (1975). Accordingly, the Corps' denial of a permit for petitioner's project, which would have filled areas subject to the ebb and flow of the tide, does not amount to a compensable taking. See Kaiser Aetna v. United States, 444 U.S. at 179.

Nor does the creation of a park protection zone amount to such a taking.³ As the district court held (Pet. App. A39), the guidelines to be developed by the Secretary of the Interior would have no force of law in themselves, but would only be used to assist local authorities in the promulgation of their own rules. See also 16 U.S.C. 230a(b). There thus is no basis for the argument that inclusion of property within the park protection zone constitutes a taking requiring compensation under the Fifth Amendment.⁴

In any event, the "taking" issue was not properly within the jurisdiction of the district court, and it so held (Pet. App. A42-A43). Plainly, if any taking has occurred there is an adequate remedy under the Tucker Act in the United States Claims Court. Regional Rail Reorganization Act Cases, 419 U.S. 102, 126-127 (1974); Yearsley v. Ross Construction Co., 309 U.S. 18, 21 (1940).

There remains the question (Pet. 10-16) whether the Corps of Engineers acted properly in denying petitioner's

Petitioner does not contest the Secretary's authority to acquire land in the "core area" of the park.

^{*}Petitioner claims (Pet. 8 n.5) that respondents never challenged the proposition that the inclusion of property within the park protection zone destroyed its value and that the district court upheld that proposition. In fact, as noted in the text above, in respondents view, the mere inclusion of property within the park protection zone does not effect a taking of the property. Moreover, as the district court held (Pet. App. A39, A42-A43), the question is premature in view of the fact that no federal regulation had taken place with respect to the park protection zone and, in any event, it lacked jurisdiction to consider the issue.

application for a permit to develop its property. Petitioner contends that the Corps of Engineers acted improperly, first, by unfairly applying "new" rules to petitioner and second, by arbitrarily denying a permit. Neither of these arguments has merit.

a. The regulations defining the jurisdiction of the Corps of Engineers under Section 10 of the Rivers and Harbors Appropriations Act had been revised by the Corps of Engineers on September 9, 1972, 37 Fed. Reg. 18289, almost a full year before petitioner began construction. Those regulations made clear that, in coastal areas, the Corps' jurisdiction extended to areas subject to tidal influence. 33 C.F.R. 209.260(k)(1)(ii) (1973) provided:

Shoreward limit of jurisdiction. Regulatory jurisdiction in coastal areas extends to the line on the shore reached by the plane of the mean (average) high water.

33 C.F.R. 209.260(k)(2) (1973) continued (emphasis added):

Bays and estuaries. Regulatory jurisdiction extends to the entire surface and bed of all water bodies subject to tidal action. Jurisdiction thus extends to the edge • • • of all such water bodies, even though portions of the water body may be extremely shallow, or obstructed by shoals, vegetation, or other barriers. Marshlands and similar areas are thus considered "navigable in law," but only so far as the area is subject to inundation by the mean high waters. The relevant test is therefore the presence of the mean high tidal waters, and not the general test described above [navigability-in-fact], which generally applies to inland rivers and lakes.[5]

³These provisions, unchanged, are now codified at 33 C.F.R. 329.12(a)(2) and (b).

It is apparent from these regulations that any coastal areas subject to the ebb and flow of the tide plainly were within the Corps' regulatory jurisdiction at the time petitioner commenced its project. Since petitioner's property, including the Kenta Canal and Bayou Bouef, as well as much of the marshland, is tidal, and indeed is connected with the intercoastal waterway (Pet. App. A21), it is clear beyond peradventure that petitioner was required to obtain a permit from the Corps.?

b. There remains only the question whether the Corps' denial of the permit requested by petitioner was reasonable. It suffices to say that petitioner's project, if permitted to go forward, would have a decided negative impact on the local ecology. The administrative record established conclusively that the project would have had adverse effects on fish and wildlife, water quality and drainage. Pet. App. A33-A34. Such damage has long been recognized as a proper basis for denial of a permit. See Zabel v. Tabb, 430 F.2d 199 (5th Cir. 1970), cert. denied, 401 U.S. 910 (1971); see also 33 C.F.R. 320.4(b).

^{*}Such regulatory jurisdiction was hardly a new concept. See United States v. Stoeco Homes, Inc., 498 F.2d at 610:

In non-tidal waters the test is actual or reasonably potential navigability. In tidal waters the test, in our view, remains what it was before 1851, the ebb and flow of the tide. And since it is clear that the 1899 Act and its 1890 predecessor were intended to adopt a definition of navigable waters at least as wide as the admiralty jurisdiction (though Congress could under the Commerce Clause have gone further) we hold that § 10 applies to tidal marshes.

^{&#}x27;Petitioner continues to rely (Pet. 10-11) on an opinion of the Corps' District Counsel, of uncertain date, that failed to apply 33 C.F.R. 35 C.F.R. 209.260(k)(1)(ii) or (2) (1973). Petitioner does not acknowledge, however, that the District Counsel's opinion was overturned by the Washington, D.C. office and, accordingly, was not binding on the Corps. Pet. App. A21-A22.

CONCLUSION

The petition for a writ of certiorari should be denied. Respectfully submitted.

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